

wolden han ben hid? He dalf up precious perils. That is to seyn, that he that hem first up dalf, he dalf up a precious peril; forwhy for the preciousnesse of swiche thinge, hath many man ben in peril.

Prose VI.

Quid autem de dignitatibus.

BUT what shal I seye of dignitees and of powers, the whiche ye men, that neither knowen verray dignitee ne verray power, areysen hem as beye as the hevене? The whiche dignitees and powers, yif they comen to any wikked man, they don as grete damages & destrucciouns as doth the flaumbe of the mountaigne Ethna, whan the flaumbe walweth up; ne no deluge ne doth so cruel harmes. Certes, thee remembreth wel, as I trowe, that thilke dignitee that men clepen the imperie of consulers, the whiche that whylom was biginninge of freedom, youre eldres coveiteden to han don away that dignitee, for the pryde of the consulers. And right for the same pryde your eldres, bifrom that tyme, hadden don away, out of the citee of Rome, the kinges name; that is to seyn, they nolde han no lenger no king. But now, yif so be that dignitees & powers be yeven to goode men, the whiche thing is ful selde, what a greable thing is ther in tho dignitees or powers but only the goodnesse of folkes that usen hem? And therfor it is thus, that honour ne comth nat to vertu for cause of dignitee, but ayeinward honour comth to dignitee for cause of vertu. But whiche is thilke youre dereworthe power, that is so cleer and so requerable? O ye ertheliche bestes, considere ye nat over which thinge that it semeth that ye han power? Now yif thou saye a mous amonges other mys, that chalaunged to himself ward right & power over alle other mys, how greet scorn woldst thou han of it? *Glosa.* So fareth it by men; the body hath power over the body, for yif thou loke wel upon the body of a wight, what thing shalt thou finde more freele than is mankinde; the whiche men wel ofte ben slayn with bytinge of smale flies, or elles with the entringe of crepinge wormes into the privitees of mannes body? But wher shal man finden any man that may exercen or haunten any right upon another man, but only upon his body, or elles upon thinges that ben lowere than the body, the whiche I clepe fortunous possessions? Mayst thou ever have any commandement over a free corage? Mayst thou

remuen fro the estat of his propre resten thought that is clyvinge togidere in himself by stedefast resoun? As whylom a tyraunt wende to confounde a free man of corage, and wende to constreyn him by en folk that wisten of a conjuracioun, which I clepe a confederacie, that was cast ayeins this tyraunt; but this freeman boot of his owne tonge and caste it in the visage of that this tyraunt wende to han maked materere of crueltee, this wyse man maked it materere of vertu.

BUT what thing is it that a man may don to another man, that he ne may receyven the same thing of othere don to folk, that folk ne may don him the same? I have herd told of Busirides, that was wont to sleen his gastes that herberweden in his hous; and he was sleyn himself of Eracles that was his gaste. Regulus hadde taken in bataile many men of Affrike and cast hem into feteres; but sone after he moste yewe his handes to ben bounde with the cheynes of hem that he hadde whylom overcomen. Wenest thou thanne that he be mighty, that hath no power to don a thing, that othere ne may don in him that he doth in othere? And yit moreover, yif it so were that these dignitees or powers hadden any propre or natural goodnesse in himself, never nolden they comen to shrewes, for contrarious thinges ne ben nat wont to ben yfelawshipped togidre. Nature refuseth that contrarious thinges ben yjoigned. And so, as I am in certain that right wikked folk han dignitees of tyme, than sheweth it wel that dignitees and powers ne ben nat goode of hir owne kindes; sin that they suffren hemself to cleven or joinen hem to shrewes. And certes, the same thing may I most digneliche jugen and seyn of alle the yiftes of fortune that most plenteuously comen to shrewes; of the whiche yiftes, I trowe that it oughte ben considered, that no man douteth that he is strong in whom he seeth strengthe; and in whom that swiftnesse is, sooth it is that he is swift. Also musike maketh musiciens, and phisike maketh phisiciens, and rethorike rethoriens. forwhy the nature of every thing maketh his propretee, ne it is nat entremedled with the effects of the contrarious thinges; and, as of wil, it chaseth out thinges that ben to it contrarie. But certes, richesse may not restrayne avarice unstaunched; ne power ne maketh nat a man mighty over himself, whiche that vicious lustes holden destreynd with cheynes that ne mowen nat be unbounden. And dignitees that ben yeven to shrewes

folk nat only ne maketh hem nat digne, but it sheweth rather al openly that they ben unworthy & undigne. And why is it thus? Certes, for ye han joye to clepen thinges with falsenames that beren hem alle in the contrarie; the whiche names ben ful ofte reproved by the effecte of the same thinges; so that these ilke richesnes ne oughten nat so that they be cleped riches; ne swich power ne oughte nat ben cleped power; ne swich dignitee ne oughte nat ben cleped dignitee.

AND at the laste, I may conclude the same thing of alle the yiftes of fortune, in which ther nis nothing to ben desired, ne that hath in himself naturel bountee, as it is ful wel ysene, for neither they ne joignen hem nat alwey to goode men, ne maken hem alwey goode to whom that they ben yjoigned.

Metre VI.

Novimus quantas dederit ruinas.

WHAN wel known how many grete harmes and destrucciouns weren don by the emperor Nero. He leet brenne the citee of Rome, & made sleen the senatoures. And he, cruel, whylom slew his brother; & he was maked moist with the blood of his moder; that is to seyn, he leet sleen and slitten the body of his moder, to seen wher he was conceived; and he lokend on every halve upon her cold dede body, ne no tere ne wette his face, but he was so hard/herted that he mighte ben domes man or juge of hir dede beautytee. And natheles, yit governed this Nero by ceptre alle the poeples that Phebus the sonne may seen, cominge from his outercoste arysinge til he hyde his bemes under the waves; that is to seyn, he governed alle the poeples by ceptre imperial that the sonne goth aboute, from est to west. And eek this Nero governed by ceptre alle the poeples that ben under the colde sterres that highten Septem triones; this is to seyn, he governede alle the poeples that ben under the party of the north. And eek Nero governede alle the poeples that the violent wind Nothus seorkleth, & baketh the brenning sandes by his drye hete; that is to seyn, alle the poeples in the south. But yit ne mighte nat al his hye power torme the woodnesse of this wikked Nero. Alas! it is a grevous fortune, as ofte as wikked swerd is joigned to cruel venim; that is to seyn, venimous crueltee to lordshippe.

Prose VII.

Cum ego, scis, inquam.

HANNE seyde I thus: Thou wost wel thyself that the covetise of mortal thinges ne hadde never lordshipe of me; but I have wel desired materere of thinges to done, as who seith, I desire to han materere of governaunce over comunaltees, for vertu, stille, ne sholde nat elden. That is to seyn, that him leste that, or he wex olde, his vertu, that lay now ful stille, ne should nat perisshe unexercised in governaunce of comune; for which men mighten speken or wryten of his goode government.

Philosophye.

FOR sothe, quod she, and that is a thing that may drawn to governaunce swiche hertes as ben worthy & noble of hir nature; but natheles, it may nat drawn or tollen swiche hertes as ben ybrought to the fulle perfeccioun of vertu, that is to seyn, covetise of glorie and renoun to han wel administred the comune thinges or don gode desertes to profit of the comune. for see now & considere, how litel and how voide of alle prys is thilke glorie. Certain thing is, as thou hast lerned by the demonstracioun of astronomye, that al the environinge of the erthe aboute ne halt nat but the resoun of a prikke at regard of the greetnesse of hevене; that is to seyn, that yif ther were maked comparisoun of the erthe to the greetnesse of hevене, men wolden jugen in al, that the erthe ne helde no space. Of the whiche litel regioun of this worlde, the ferthe partye is enhabited with livinge bestes that we knowen, as thou thyself hast ylerned by Tholomee that proveth it. And yif thou haddest withdrawn and abated in thy thought fro thilke ferthe partye as moche space as the see & the mareys contenen & overgoon, & as moche space as the regioun of droughte overstretcheth, that is to seyn, sandes and desertes, wel unnethe sholde ther dwellen a right streit place to the habitaacioun of men. And ye thanne, that ben enviroined & closed within the leste prikke of thilke prikke, thinke ye to manifesten your renoun & don youre name to ben born forth? But your glorie, that is so narwe and so streite ythrongen into so litel boundes, how moche coveteth it in largesse and in greet doinge? And also sette this thereto: that many a nacioun, dyverse of tonge and of maneres and eek of resoun of hir livinge, ben enhabited in the clos of thilke litel ha-